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12 Long Years

U. S. Senator Dodd of Connecticut was on hand. He had tried for a long time to gain freedom for the man. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Celebrezze was there. So was U. S. Representative Grabowski of Connecticut. And so was Mrs. Mary Downey.

It happened last week in New Britain, Conn. The city was dedicating a road in its industrial park. They called the road John T. Downey Drive.

Mrs. Downey, a troubled looking, retired school teacher and widow, cut the ribbon at the ceremonies. Soon she would be off on her fourth, heart-wrenching journey to a cell block deep in Red China. There, she would talk—but only shortly, and only in guarded words—with her son.

John T. Downey is a hero in New Britain. He was somewhat of a hero even before his experiences of the last 12 years. Prior to those dozen agonizing years he was a sports figure of some standing. At Yale, from which he was graduated with high academic honors, he was a varsity athlete in football, wrestling and track. He even found time for literary magazine efforts of quality.

But, graduation from Yale saw him take employment in a civilian program with the federal government. He was sent to Japan. The Korean war was on, and Downey hopped a plane to a rear echelon position to visit a friend on duty there. In a return plane hop, the aircraft strayed too close to Red-

held territory, and Communist gunfire brought it down. Downey was captured, later to be tried and convicted as a "Central Intelligence Agent" who was called "ringleader" in an effort to "airdrop" supplies to "other CIA men."

For 12 years, Downey has sat in a Red Chinese cell, serving a life sentence. For 12 years, diplomatic maneuvers have failed to free him. And for 12 years, Mary Downey has been a sympathetically-received thorn in the side of the federal government, making frequent visits to high Washington officials in an effort to free her son.

Downey is not the only American still held in Red China. The number has dwindled considerably since the Korean War, but two or three others languish in prison there—including at least one man, Richard Fecteau of Lynn, Mass., who was on the plane with the New Britain man. When Downey will be freed—if ever—no one can say. Meanwhile, he receives mail, books and cigars from his mother, his friends and the New Britain folks who remember the hometown athlete who hitched a ride on the wrong airplane.

And along about mid - November, Downey's friends—Fecteau's, too—will be mailing out Christmas cards. (It takes a long time for the non-air mail cards to get to the prisoners.) Any one who wants to let Downey and Fecteau know they are not forgotten at the Yuletide, can do the same then. The address for each of them is "c/o Chinese National Red Cross, Peking, China."